



Birds, Beasts and Flowers

D.H. Lawrence

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D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) made a contribution to poetry that, in the words of Lousie Bogan, "can now be recognized as one of the most important, in any language, of our time." *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers!*, his first great experiment in free verse, was published when he was thirty-eight. This Black Sparrow edition re-sets the text in the format of the first edition (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923) and restores several "indecent" lines suppressed by the original publisher. Lawrence's original jacket artwork is reproduced on the jacket in full color.

Many of these individual poems are popular in anthologies - they are best read, however, in the context and continuum of the whole book. In preparing the original collection for publication, Lawrence grouped the poems in a purposeful sequence and prefaced many of the subsections with brief quotations from the third edition of John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, which particularly interested him at the time.

He believed in writing poetry that was stark, immediate and true to the mysterious inner force which motivated it. Many of his best-loved poems treat the physical and inner life of plants and animals; others are bitterly satiric and express his outrage at the puritanism and hypocrisy of conventional Anglo-Saxon society. -- Academy of American Poets

Birds, Beasts and Flowers is the peak of Lawrence's achievement as a poet...Like the romantics [his] starting point in these poems is a personal encounter between himself and some animal or flower, but, unlike the romantics, he never confuses the feelings they arouse in him with what he sees and hears and knows about them. The lucidity of his language matches the intensity of his vision; he can make the reader see what he is saying as very few writers can. -- W.H. Auden

Birds, Beasts and Flowers Details

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From Reader Review Birds, Beasts and Flowers for online ebook

Lauren says

Not a lot to say about this one, unfortunately. Most of his poems didn't really capture my imagination. But the poems I did enjoy lift it from being a sad 'meh' of two stars. Also I loved that his longest poem was about his own pet dog, Bibbles. That was pretty sweet.

Favourite poems: Snake, Fish, and Kangaroo.

Ganglion Bard-barbarian says

I found the illustrations to be boring, but the excerpts are well-selected. A good introduction to Lawrence's poetry for children. The copy I read was marred with a "DISCARD" stamp from the Staunton Public Library in Staunton, VA. I wonder how many less provocative children's books were retained in the library's collection.

Wilson says

The Evening Land should be projected onto the White House. It is how the rest of the world feel.

The Evening Land

OH America

The sun sets in you.

Are you the grave of our day?

Shall I come to you, the open tomb of my race?

I would come, if I felt my hour had struck.

I would rather you came to me.

For that matter

Mahomet never went to any mountain

Save it had first approached him and cajoled his soul.

You have cajoled the souls of millions of us

America,

Why won't you cajole my soul?

I wish you would.

I confess I am afraid of you.

The catastrophe of your exaggerate love,

You who never find yourself in love

But only lose yourself further, decomposing.

You who never recover from out of the orgasm of loving
Your pristine, isolate integrity, lost aeons ago.
Your singleness within the universe.

You who in loving break down
And break further and further down
Your bounds of isolation,
But who never rise, resurrected, from this grave of mingling,
In a new proud singleness, America.

Your more-than-European idealism,
Like a be-aureoled bleached skeleton hovering
Its cage-ribs in the social heaven, beneficent.

And then your single resurrection
Into machine-uprisen perfect man.

Even the winged skeleton of your bleached ideal
Is not so frightening as that clean smooth
Automaton of your uprisen self,
Machine American.

Do you wonder that I am afraid to come
And answer the first machine-cut question from the lips of
your iron men?
Put the first cents into metallic fingers of your officers
And sit beside the steel-straight arms of your fair women
American?

This may be a withering tree, this Europe,
But here, even a customs-official is still vulnerable.

I am so terrified, America,
Of the iron click of your human contact.
And after this
The winding-sheet of your self-less ideal love.
Boundless love
Like a poison gas.

Does no one realise that love should be intense, individual,
Not boundless.
This boundless love is like the bad smell
Of something gone wrong in the middle.
All this philanthropy and benevolence on other people's
behalf
Just a bad smell.

Yet, America,
Your elvishness.
Your New England uncanniness,
Your western brutal faery quality.

My soul is half-cajoled, half-cajoled.

Something in you which carries me beyond
Yankee, Yankee,
What we call human.
Carries me where I want to be carried . . .
Or don't I?

What does it matter
What we call human, and what we don't call human?
The rose would smell as sweet.
And to be limited by a mere word is to be less than a
hopping flea, which hops over such an obstruction at
first jump.

Your horrible, skeleton, aureoled ideal.
Your weird bright motor-productive mechanism,
Two spectres.

But moreover
A dark, unfathomed will, that is not un-Jewish;
A set, stoic endurance, non-European;
An ultimate desperateness, un-African;
A deliberate generosity, non-Oriental.

The strange, unaccustomed geste of your demonish
New World nature
Glimpsed now and then.

Nobody knows you.
You don't know yourself.
And I, who am half in love with you,
What am I in love with?
My own imaginings?

Say it is not so.

Say, through the branches
America, America
Of all your machines,
Say, in the deep sockets of your idealistic skull,
Dark, aboriginal eyes
Stoic, able to wait through ages
Glancing.

Say, in the sound of all your machines
And white words, white-wash American,
Deep pulsing of a strange heart
New throb, like a stirring under the false dawn that
precedes the real.

Nascent American

Demonish, lurking among the undergrowth
Of many-stemmed machines and chimneys that smoke
like pine-trees.

Dark, elvish,
Modern, unissued, uncanny America,
Your nascent demon people
Lurking among the deeps of your industrial thicket
Allure me till I am beside myself,
A nympholept.

"These States!" as Whitman said,
Whatever he meant.

Annie says

Lawrence is one of my favourite prose authors, but I was pleasantly surprised by his poetry. I didn't see his style translating well from prose to poetry, as the prose is already so poetic and abstract that to increase that element would make it overdone and purpley, but no, his poetry's actually written in a totally different style. I'd compare it to Eliot if he decided wrote about— well, about birds, beasts, and flowers. Or maybe Baudelaire? It's good.

While I can't say I like his poetry better than many of his novels, there's something very satisfying and curious about it. Something languid and distinctly modernist, though with a hint of something that reminds me of the later Beatnik era.

Pelagia says

I agree with Jane Hirshfield: "And my knowledge of life and of what it means to live fully and well a human life would be narrowed had I never read 'Snake'."

Matthew says

"Why so velvety, why so voluptuous heavy?
Why hanging with such inordinate weight?
Why so indented?

Why the groove?
Why the lovely, bivalve roundnesses?
Why the ripple down the sphere?
Why the suggestion of incision?

Why was not my peach round and finished like a billiard ball?
It would have been if man had made it.

Though I've eaten it now.

But it wasn't round and finished like a billiard ball.
And because I say so, you would like to throw something at me.

Here, you can have my peach stone."

Caesaree says

I keep re-reading certain poems and passages in this book and I haven't even finished it yet. It makes me feel so in love with life. Waking up each day I already know how much I joy I feel, but when I read certain details he writes, I realize how delicate and precious some of the most intricate details are of tangibles I never even really notice or possibly even find mundane.

Rodney says

It's silly on the face of it to call D.H. Lawrence a neglected writer. Penguin's kept all his books in print since the '60s, and he's one of the few genuinely popular modernists, with his work available in cheap paperback editions the world over. Hollywood's been kind, too; even *Kangaroo* got made into a movie.

Still, Lawrence the poet often disappears in the shadow of Lawrence the sex(ist) guru, Lawrence the proto-fascist, or Lawrence of the Chatterley scandal. The loose free verse line he adapted from Whitman is too familiar now to seem as fresh as it did in 1923, closer in form and spirit to today's MFA workshop verse than to the more radical experiments of his Modernist peers.

So despite his fame, the poems in *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* (which Black Sparrow restores here in its earlier edition, complete with Lawrence's own 1930 cover design) were a discovery. If Lawrence isn't already an important poet for the growing "Eco-Poetics" school, he should be—the intensity with which he tests human consciousness against the rival claims of plants and animals seems in tune with that constellation of contemporary interests. While the embarrassing sex-ridden stuff, though not intentionally funny, reads proto-flarf.

I don't know many (really, any) poets talking seriously about Lawrence today; maybe he's the neglected growth in bloom right under our nose.

Dhandayutha says

Lawrence was the one of the most beautiful soul who had ever walked on the earth. These collection of poems are testament to it. If the task of literature is to give the man a greatest experience lawrence can give utmost ecstasy of being alive. According to lawrence there are only two kinds writers .writers who abuse himself for not able to become a great (Masochist)(tolstoy).writers who abuse others(dostoevsky).Lawrence hated very much the stoic mind,according to him one must shout,scream,cry to do anything possible to save life from degrading factors.

Lawrence described his task was to relieve suffering of man from the feelings he don't even know what it is about. Lawrence was in a way very much against "mental world" "knowledge". The main reason for him to fought a war for sex was to save it from mental experience which stop man from attaining deep physical orgasm. as he said "our sex is not in our genitals rather it is in our mind" He wrote two books on "psychoanalysis" and the necessity of relieving from a mental world, which were lesser known. Lawrence had also written a book "pornography and sex" Where he elaborates why the modern world must stop seeing sex a dirty word!

Lawrence had been described as serious writer with no sense of humour. But if you get a chance to read his "studies on classical american literature" you would be shocked by his parody and illuminating insights on modern life and literature.

Lawrence was superb travel writer his book like sardinia and twilight in italy can give you different kind of experience .To some he may seem silly or rubbish. What he offers was neither fact nor history rather a subjective experience. Mode of viewing things.

In a way this collection of poems also can be said as mode of viewing subjective experience unifying oneself with nature. "Non mental world" which Lawrence was always fond of. Snake fish are already popular poems from this collection. Some may feel uncomfortable with his sexual approach to things. But to him sex was the most creative act and unifying force. God was the greatest imagination possible so was nature to him.

Lawrence described living "religious life is like standing naked on the fire" he had great knowledge on religious texts. his book "apocalypse" was an example to it. Most of his novel motifs were take from religious texts (eg. aaron rod). Also his essays collection "reflection on porcupine " carried the prophetic insight of modern life .If one read it today he must be surprised to know how far lawrence was right and what an original thinker he was!

The man who all his life struggled to give mankind a deepest a religious experience ,experience of being alive was labelled as misogynist ,sexual maniac, bastard and most of his work were rejected during his lifetime!

If one read these collection of poems one may understand what a religious man he was!

Erin says

It's a towering achievement, actually. A collection of reveries on the natural world, a swirl of admiration, adoration, and aversion. It's a tangled and confusing collection, with leitmotif laced throughout. Sometimes beautiful, sometimes painful, but interesting most of the time.

But I have trouble. I find it so hard to accept Lawrence's sexuality, which at the end of the day, feels more like misogyny than freedom. And the laced undertone of egotism. I'm just not really embracing it.

Emily Crow says

Some good poems, esp "Humming-Bird." Overall, a bit too over-wrought and sexist. Still, there are some interesting images and ideas buried in here, so I would recommend it for poetry buffs.

Lark Benobi says

"Snake" remains one of my favorite poems since I first read it as a child, and is the reason I wanted to read the whole anthology. I discovered that not many of the poems are similar to "Snake," though, which is a narrative rather than a description of sensual pleasure, which many of these other poems are. I can imagine some readers will find Lawrence's lack of restraint in these poems--in particular the fruit poems--a little over-indulgent. But what's over-indulgent? What does that mean, anyway, that we are only allowed so much ecstatic reverie per poem? Once I let go of my formal ideas of where a poem should go I loved this collection from start to finish. I found many of the poems shatteringly beautiful.

It's a wonderful experience to read the original collection where a favorite poem was first published. It's a very different reading experience than reading a poem plucked out of context and put into an anthology with other poets.

Jeffrey St. says

Like Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Lawrence's Birds, Beasts and Flowers is a unique poetic achievement, where new forms are invented without sacrificing a coherent and hypnotic voice or the vitality and sharpness of its imagery. It surely ranks alongside Pound's Cantos, Eliot's Four Quartets and William Carlos Williams' Paterson as one of the most important poetic cycles in the 20th century.

Rebecca says

Since I discovered it, this has been and remains one of my favorite books of poems, alongside Lawrence's other non-rhyming poetry book, "Look, We Have Come Through." There is a kind of incantatory quality to Lawrence, which he mysteriously achieves despite having some of the most seemingly free-flowing and organic lines in the English language. The poems do, as the title suggest, take the natural world as their subject, but this is not a book of nature poems. Rather, it reveals that everything, including the most evangelical, urbane, industrial elements of our lives, are encompassed by that concept, "The Natural World," to say nothing of our own humanity - our desires, anxieties, revelations. Though I am not a great fan of Lawrence's fiction, I can only describe his poems as having a kind of "lyric ferocity" about them. This is truly exceptional stuff.

Jgilon41 says

If you think you're a hippy, wait till you read these poems. DH Lawrence knows, loves, and fears the natural life. Surprising and acute details about such awesome forms as figs and fish.
